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**Dialogue of Civilisation: an Islamic Perspective and the Experience of the
Centre for Civilisational Dialogue**

By:

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DIALOGUE OF CIVILISATION: AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE AND THE
EXPERIENCE OF THE CENTRE FOR CIVILISATIONAL DIALOGUE

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Introduction

To the 1.9 billion Muslims in the world today, the *Quran* and *Hadiths* are the most crucial sources of knowledge regarding the religion. In these sources, interfaith/cultural/civilisational dialogue is very much emphasized. It is perhaps unfortunate that despite the importance that Islam places on dialogue, many, beginning with Muslims themselves do not know the body of teachings and literature concerning it. This subject is now growing very fast in its importance, especially after the unfortunate event of 9/11 as well as Samuel Huntington's theory of 'the clash of civilisations'.¹ As a response to these events, Muslims have initiated and participated in intercivilisational dialogue at many different levels and in many different forms all over the world in the past 10 years.²

¹ Osman Bakar (2006) *The Quran on Interfaith and Inter-Civilisation Dialogue: Interpreting A Divine Message For Twentieth Century Humanity* IIITM and ISUGU, Kuala Lumpur. pp1

² Ibid

Generally, the Quran (first documented in the 6th century AD) already foresaw the rise of the issues surrounding the diversity and plurality of cultural and faith systems in the world, which in this globalised and globalising and post-modern era, has become the focus of global discourses and debates, as deemed from the pronouncement of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of the Dialogue of Civilisation which was actually spurred by the Islamic Symposium on Dialogue Among Civilisations held in Tehran, Iran in May 1999.³

Dialogue was an important issue during the Prophet's days because of the context of 'pluralism' amongst the tribes of the Arabs.⁴ The need for dialogue was also important because as the prophet of what was then perceived to be a 'new religion', he had to face the challenges and questionings of Christians and Jews. To Muslims, Islam is only a continuation of the earlier faith systems that came before it.

It can perhaps be argued also that in its historical development, the rise and development of the 'Islamic Civilisation', which via Andalusia reached Eastern Europe in the West and China in the East, was to a certain degree due to the dialogical frame of mind that laced the early Muslim outlook in their encounter of others. To begin with, the Quran reminds Muslims and others who may want to share the same idea that: "The original pair of male and female (Adam and Eve), God had created human beings into different nations and tribes, so that the may

³ Azizan Baharuddin (2005) *Islam dan Dialog Peradaban: Satu Perspektif* (Islam and Civilisational Dialogue: An Islamic Perspective), CCD, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. pp7

⁴ Op cit, Osman Bakar (2006), pp3.

get to know one another (not so that they may hate each other); and that the best amongst mankind in the eyes of God are those who are best in their conduct/works/deeds and that God indeed knows who are the best in *taqwa* (close) to Him.⁵

Today, as we have seen, so great has been the changes in the transformations of traditional societies in the world. These transformations include in its wake a critical need for acknowledging diversity in cultures and beliefs/civilisational values and backgrounds and that the sustainability of human society in the future will require a 'sound management' of such diversities.⁶

Quranic References to Dialogue With the 'People of the Book'.

One of the earliest references to dialogue begins with the following verse;

*"Say: 'O People of the Book! Come here for a word which is common between you and us: that we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than God.' If they turn back, you say: 'Bear witness that we are Muslims.'"*⁷

Khalid Duran who is a famous contemporary Muslim scholar argues that the statement "come here for a word which is in common between you and us" actually gives a meaning of dialogue (word between = *dia-logos* = conversation partners).⁸ It also means "come to a dialogue with us on a common platform". In

the context of its time, the verse perhaps is referring more specifically to the 'people of the book'. However, its implication and use would/could be more wide and general today.

*"Invite (all) to the way of the Lord with wisdom and beautiful discourses; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for your Lord knows best who have strayed from His path and who receives guidance."*⁹

The above verse however supports dialogue as the means to inform those who are not Muslims (believers in God or not) of the Quran's view on various issues. It (the verse) asks that when arguing with others, it must be done in a pleading and gracious manner, and that the arguments must be good (logical, not hurtful to the other etc). We will consider the *adab/etiquette* of dialogue more later.

When it is intended, not only for dialogue with or among believers, the verse can also be understood to invite or encourage dialogue of civilisations (instead of/amongst those with religious faith). That the plurality of human beings is a divine condition in itself is stated by the Quran:

*"If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you; so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute."*¹⁰

⁵ Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1989) *The Meaning of the Holy Quran* (New Edition with revised translation and commentary) Amena Corporation, Brentwood, USA, pp3.

⁶ Op cit, Osman Bakar (2006), pp3.

⁷ Quran, Chapter 3 (The Family of Imran) Verse 64.

⁸ Khalid Duran (1998) *The Drafting of A Global Ethics: A Muslim Perspective*, Global Dialogue Institute, quoted in Osman Bakar (2006), *ibid*, pp5.

⁹ Quran, Chapter 16 (The Bee) Verse 125.

¹⁰ Quran, Chapter 5 (The Repast) Verse 48.

The Medina Constitution and the Plural Community¹¹

Drawn up in 622 AD by Muhammad, it was the first one of its kind. What is important is that it guarantees the rights of minority non-Muslims in Muslim society. In Malaysia, Muslims and non-Muslims are continuously in dialogue with one another especially in a world that is increasingly becoming plural every day.¹² Malaysia is a 50 years old nation with the Malays (who are the majority and Muslims), Chinese, Indians and indigenous groups living together since a millennium ago at least. Since during the Prophets time, the Islamic perspective vis-à-vis a plural society is an inclusive one. The 2nd and 25th articles of the Constitution of Medina, states: "Verily the (non-Muslims) constitute a political unit (ummah) distinct from all the other people (of the world). And the Jews of the Banu Aufa shall be considered as a community (ummah) along with the believers (Muslims) (even if), for the Jews their religion and for the Muslims their religion.", mirror this inclusiveness.

Three Forms of Extreme Positions

In the spirit of approaching dialogue in a plural society, Muslims are also asked not to take on 3 extreme modes/positions in their implementation of laws/governances. These 3 forms are:

¹¹ Medina Constitution, http://www.constitution.org/cons/medina/cons_medina.htm, accessed May 13th, 2008

¹² There are various types of dialogue, one of which is the 'dialogue of life' through which different groups interact whilst undergoing their life's activities.

1. Extremist position whereby the limits of balance is overstepped in ones endeavour to carry our certain procedures or regulations.
2. Chauvinism or *ta'sub*. In this situation, one's position is that one's own group is the best, the most true, and that any 'ideas' or 'ways' of others are all false and must be destroyed at all costs.
3. Fanaticism (which is close to psychosis) is a position/action taken on the premise of one's own understanding only, without regard to objectivity and the possible relevance of the opinion of others.¹³

The Quran's view on these negative predispositions is very clear.

*"...if anyone slew a person unless it is for murder of for doing mischief in the land, it would be as if he slew the whole people. And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people..."*¹⁴

Guidance in Dialogue

The following verses provide further and could perhaps be seen to be the basis of the ethics of dialogue. Principles of balance, cooperation in the doing of good, justice, humility, patience are especially emphasised.

*"Thus have We made of you an ummah justly balanced, that ye might be witness over the nations, and the messenger a witness over yourselves."*¹⁵

*"Help ye one another in righteousness and in piety, but help ye not one another in sin and rancour..."*¹⁶

"Oh ye who believe! stand out firmly for justice as witness to Allah even as against yourselves, your parents, or your kin, and whether it is

¹³ Osman Bakar (2006) *The Qur'an on Interfaith and Inter-Civilisation Dialogue*, International Institute of Islamic Thought Malaysia (IIITM), Kuala Lumpur

¹⁴ Quran, Chapter 5 (The Repast) Verse 32.

¹⁵ Quran, Chapter 2 (The Heifer/The Cow) Verse 143

¹⁶ Quran, Chapter 5 (The Repast) Verse 2

(against) rich or poor... if you distort justice or decline to do justice...Allah is well acquainted with all that you do."¹⁷

"And the servants of the Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility and when the ignorant address them, say 'peace'."¹⁸

The Concept Of Civilisation in Islam

Before we embark on the idea of the dialogue of civilisation, perhaps it is useful to understand the concept of civilisation in the Islamic perspective. Three central ideas underlie the Islamic theory of civilization: religion (*deen*), religious community (*ummah*), and the city (*madinah*), as the center of urban civilization; of which the city of the Prophet was the first and the model. If we study the Quran, it is clear that every civilization is basically the product of the dynamic interactions of these three elements. As explained by Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) it is interesting to note that Islam was primarily an urban phenomenon from its very beginning. It was in the 'Medinah' urban setting that the Islamic civilization arose i.e. where, what Ibn Khaldun called *umran hadari* (urban civilization) grew its roots. Further as explained by the *Hujurat* Verse (referring to different 'nations' and 'tribes' the Quran affirms that humankind has been destined to live in a world split up into a multitude of ummahs, and civilizations. But can peace reign amongst these different and diverse civilizations? In this regard, the Quran provides fundamental guidelines for the enhancement of mutual acceptance among civilizations.

¹⁷ Quran, Chapter 4 (The Women) Verse 135
¹⁸ Quran, Chapter 25 (The Criterion) Verse 63

Why the Necessity for Dialogue?

In the words of Leonard Swidler, 'a world with clashing or potentially clashing cultural, religious, ethnic groups is the world of the beginning of the 3rd millennium.'¹⁹ Dialogues of faiths and civilizations are necessary, because different faiths and different civilizations have different worldviews, and sometimes contradictory philosophical stand points on the various issues facing humankind. Religions and civilizations may use also different ways of solving these problems. However, there are certain facts about our world that we have to admit and confront with honesty and commitment together, if peace is to prevail. As stated in the preamble of the Earth Charter:

"We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations."²⁰

More often than not, humankind has failed to live as responsible world citizens in line with the diverse and plural character of the global community. First, we must overcome our ignorance of one another. We need to understand what are our similarities and differences after which there needs to be mutual respect, despite

¹⁹ L. Swidler (2003) *Dialogue in Malaysia and the Global Scenario*, Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, pp1.
²⁰ The Earth Charter, <http://www.earthcharter.org>

the differences. Once this is done, as the Earth Charter says, there is much work to be done vis-à-vis the environmental crisis and the crisis of meaning of human existence amongst others. Throughout this exercise, dialogue is the only mechanism. Dialogue is antithetical to the clash of civilisation. It is inevitable and through it cultures and religions can look forward to a process of healing of the deep problems that inhere in many aspects of modern culture and which threaten our survival.²¹ To the Quran, dialogue is a necessity in all conditions. It is a virtue and an ideal to be pursued. What are some of the critical issues faced by humanity?

As mentioned, the most pressing issue seems to be the question of ethics/values in regards to knowledge such as biotechnology in science and technology; in business and in economics, in politics which all for example impact the environment and our well-being. Together with other scriptures, the Quran calls on humankind to revere God who had created this beautiful planet Earth for all of us to share, and for us to develop and cultivate in ourselves a God-consciousness. From the spiritual point of view, what lies underneath all these issues is the question of belief.

*"O humankind! Adore your Lord, Who has created you and those before you, so that you may attain God-consciousness; Who has made the earth a resting-place for you and the sky a canopy; and caused water to pour down from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you. And do not set up rivals to God when you know (better)."*²²

Another important subject that could be the focus of dialogue is the issue of the

²¹ Op.cit, L. Swidler (2003)

²² Quran, Chapter 2 (The Heifer/The Cow) Verse 21-22

break down of the family institution and family values. Many communities face common threats to this institution and dialogue can allow the sharing of mutual concerns and strategies for facing and solving the problem.

The Quran is interested in inviting the whole of humankind to dialogue on family institutions and values, as is it seeks to reaffirm, again and again, the idea of the common good (*al-khayra*).²³ It is for the sake of the common good of all religions and civilizations that traditional family institutions and values should be preserved and protected at all costs. Again the notion of the 'common good' is very much the philosophy of the Earth Charter, for example.

The Qur'an is also interested in dialogues among all peoples, because it also wants to remind everyone that its teachings are not just for the benefits of Arabs and Muslims, but is also meant for everyone:

*"O humankind! The Apostle hath come to you in truth from God: believe in him, it is best for you. But if you reject faith, to God belong all things in the heavens and on earth, and God is All-knowing, All-wise."*²⁴

Muslims also feel that dialogue is critical in their context because they want to share what they perceive to be the divine fact and wisdom of human pluralism and diversity that characterizes our global community as acknowledged and reminded by the Earth Charter.²⁵ Communities who have this understanding are more likely to celebrate pluralism and diversity. The Quran stresses that "mutual

²³ Op.cit, Osman Bakar (2006), pp 1-4.

²⁴ Quran, Chapter 4 (The Women) Verse 170

²⁵ The Earth Charter, <http://www.earthcharter.org>, accessed May 13th, 2008 (See Annex)

acquaintance, recognition and understanding" among the different ethnic groups and nations should be the result of this wisdom. In another verse, the Quran explains how despite the differences among the different groups, humanity is united in its goal in the striving for the good.

"...To each among you, have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He had given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute."²⁶

The Creator could have made all human beings members of one single ethnic group and one single religious community. But pluralism and diversity in human society, as in the non-human realms of creation, seems to be the preferred pattern of creation.

In the Islamic perspective therefore, plurality and diversity is part of the theological framework. God is the affirmed and the transcendent source of plurality and diversity in both the natural and the human orders. The spiritual and moral purpose of human plurality and diversity is mutual recognition and mutual understanding (of each other) in the Name of God. An important theme in Islamic pluralism is the idea of unity in diversity, which in fact, characterizes every domain of creation. In the natural realm, this is exemplified by the concept of ecology for example. On the human plane, all evidence seems to point today (as indicated by the Earth Charter, that) man should strive for unity in diversity in his quest for sustaining civilization in the future.

²⁶ Quran, Chapter 5 (The Table Spread) Verse 48

Dialogue can be seen to be an important catalyst in the human endeavour to know one another; to cooperate despite differences and to compete for excellence. What is being emphasized by the Quran is that this excellence must be elevated to become universal in moral terms. Important as blood, skin, and ancestry may be they should not conflict with values such as justice. As Osman Bakar puts it: the idea of religious diversity is to serve a certain divine purpose, namely, to create a favourable condition for followers of the different religions to 'strive as in a race' in the inculcation of virtues and moral excellence.²⁷

Muslims are also asked to be 'the community of the middle path' (*ummatan wasatan*) or the 'moderate community'.

"Thus have We made of you an ummah (community) justly balanced, that you might be witness over the nations, and the Apostle a witness over yourselves."²⁸

To be 'witnesses over the nations' means to be a community that strives to be a shining example to the rest of the world in the practice of moderation, justice, and equilibrium. However, what is dominant currently is malaise, the ummah has lost many, if not all, of the excellent attributes of the middle path community. In consequence, Muslims today can hardly be seen to be able to perform a global role as 'witnesses over the nations'. Nevertheless, the idea of the *ummatan wasatan*, has been set as the benchmark of a descent global community that should be aspired for. Muslims today are duty bound to be engaged in the global dialogue amongst faiths and civilizations. Such participations would not only help

²⁷ Op cit, Osman Bakar (2006), pp 18.

²⁸ Quran, Chapter 2 (The Heifer/The Cow) Verse 143

them to be more conscious of the gap between the Quranic ideal and the current state of the *ummah* that needs to be narrowed down but also allow them to contribute in the promotion of the Earth Charter as well as narrow the gap between the Islamic World and the West.

The Goals Of Dialogues Of Faiths And Civilizations

Dialogue of religions and of civilizations is to remind ourselves of the basic truth of humankind's unity, and to then create opportunities for all members of the global community to cooperate and collaborate in various kinds of activities for the common good. This quest for the common good of all, has been clearly spelt out by the Quran:

*"To each is a goal to which God turns him; then strive together (as in a race) towards all that is good (al-khayrat). Wherever you are, God will bring you together. For God has power over all things."*²⁹

The Quranic pursuit of the common good is not limited to the production of positive and good things that are generally recognized by human beings to be right, good and useful: what the Qur'an repeatedly calls enjoining what is right and good" (*amr bi'l-ma'ruf*)³⁰, and the rejection of things that human beings generally see as morally wrong, destructive and harmful (*nahy 'anil-munkar*)³¹.

²⁹ Quran, Chapter 2 (The Heifer/The Cow) Verse 148

³⁰ Quran, Chapter 3 (The Family of Imran) Verse 104 and 110

³¹ ibid

Under the Quranic category of *ma'ruf*, we may refer to the universal goods commonly desired by all nations such as universal education, kindness, tolerance, charity, global security, international peace and order, socio-economic justice, protection of the environment, and state policies ensuring adequate supplies of food and energy etc. The category of *munkar* embraces the 'common voices' of human societies, such as corruption, oppression, prostitution, drugs, use of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism and all other acts that pose a threat to human life and civilization, such as environmental pollution.³²

The list of things that are considered by all nations to be right, good or useful, and those that they consider as wrong, evil or destructive, is likely to grow with time as the space of our common human civilization broadens. As our common interests and our common challenges multiply, it is imperative for the global community to intensify its pursuit of dialogues of civilizations with the expressed aim of identifying priorities for our collective action, either in terms of fostering *ma'ruf*, or eradicating *munkar*.³³

Before dialogue can get well on its way, we need to enhance mutual understanding already existing among peoples of diverse beliefs and cultures, to begin with. In this context, the seminar that is being held here today is a very good step in this direction.

³² Op.cit, Osman Bakar (2006), pp 22.

³³ ibid

We may conceive of this mutual understanding as ranging from having knowledge of our respective physical characteristics at its lowest level, like skin color, to knowledge of our common humanity which is spiritual in nature. In between, we need to have mutual understandings at the levels of knowledge of manners and customs, and of the higher aspects of culture and civilization. This mutual acquaintance and understanding, if progressively pursued from the lowest to the highest levels, should lead us to a better appreciation of our similarities and differences, as well as the oneness of the human family. The higher purpose of ethnic diversity and pluralism is so that all ethnic and racial groups can finally come to recognize and acknowledge their common humanity. Without this recognition and acknowledgment, the pursuit of human solidarity and brotherhood on earth would not be possible.

Ground Rules for Inter-religious, Inter-ideological Dialogue

Dialogue is a conversation on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow. This very definition of dialogue embodies the first commandment of dialogue. In the religious-ideological sphere in the past, people came together to discuss with those differing from them, either to defeat an opponent, or to learn about an opponent so as to deal more effectively with them, or at best to negotiate with them. If people faced each other at all, it was in confrontation sometimes more openly polemically, sometimes more subtly so, but always with the ultimate goal of defeating each other, because of the conviction that each party alone had the absolute truth.³⁴

Dialogue is not debate, each partner must listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as he can in an attempt to understand the other's position as

precisely and, as much from within, as possible. Interreligious, interideological dialogue is new. We can effectively engage in it by following some basic rules. These are not only theoretical rules, or commandments given from above, but ones that have been learned from experience.³⁵

FIRST COMMANDMENT: *The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly. We enter into dialogue so that we can learn, change, and grow, not so we can force change on another, as one hopes to do in debate.*

SECOND COMMANDMENT: *Interreligious, interideological dialogue must be a two-sided project within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities. Because of the corporate nature of interreligious dialogue, and since the primary goal of dialogue is that each partner learn and change himself, it is also necessary that each participant enter into dialogue not only with his partner across the faith for example, but also with his coreligionists.*

THIRD COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. It should be made clear in what direction the major and minor thrusts of the tradition move, what the future shifts might be, and, if necessary, where the participant has difficulties with her own tradition. No false fronts have any place in dialogue. Conversely each participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners.*

FOURTH COMMANDMENT: *In interreligious, interideological dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our practice with our partner's practice.*

FIFTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must define himself, only the Jew, can define what it means to be a Jew, for example. The rest can only describe what it looks like from the outside.*

SIXTH COMMANDMENT: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. Rather, each partner should not only listen to the other partner with openness and sympathy but also attempt to agree with the dialogue partner as far as is possible while still maintaining integrity with his own tradition; where he absolutely can agree no further without violating his own integrity.*

³⁴ Op. cit, L. Swidler (2003), pp77-80

³⁵ Ibid

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: Dialogue can take place only between equals. Both must come to learn from each other.

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust.

NINTH COMMANDMENT: Persons entering into interreligious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own interpretation of their traditions.

TENTH COMMANDMENT: Each participant eventually must attempt to understand the partner's perception and experience of his religion or ideology from within; for a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and whole being, individual and communal.

Obstacles to Dialogue

One important obstacle to dialogue is the exclusivistic attitude. It is normal for anyone to be born 'multiculturally illiterate'. 'Knowledge of others' has to be acquired with the admission that one needs to know to begin with. Feelings/perceptions that only one's group possesses as truth, needs to be managed especially when in dialogue with others. Another obstacle is the fear of conversion; i.e. dialogue is not greeted with enthusiasm as there is a danger of one becoming converted into the worldview or faith of the dialogue partner. This situation is also related to another inconvenience in that when one offers to enter into dialogue, there is also the fear that one's coreligionists will not understand and might look suspiciously at the effort, a 'dilution of faith' is also seen to be a possible outcome. Other factors that can also discourage dialogue is 'defensiveness' which arises because one is concerned that one is not able to 'defend' one's position/ religion properly because of factors such as lack of

knowledge or lack of skills in articulating one's position. This factor is of course linked with the possibility of becoming 'embarrassed' when one is seen to have failed one's group in the dialogue concerned.

Civilisational Dialogue at the University of Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD)

The University of Malaya Centre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD) was established in 1996, just before Samuel P. Huntington published his thesis of the 'Clash of Civilisation'. The setting up of the centre was because of the fact that dialogue of civilisation was fast becoming a much needed mechanism for discoursing issues that arise from the inevitable encounter between nations, ethnic groups, faith systems, ideologies, worldviews and cultures. The expansion of globalization spurred by the rapid developments of science and technology is one of the main forces behind this reality. Looking at civilization not merely in the context of the past, the centre's main focus is on the articulation of values that may be the basis of a common platform for the solving of issues and problems universally encountered across and within cultures and civilizations. The centre has successfully organised a great number of workshops and conferences locally and internationally as well as run resident and visiting research fellowship programmers for scholars locally and internationally. The centre also acts as a reference point as well as serve on consultative basis many government and non-government organisations locally and abroad. To date it has published

widely on many topics pertaining to the dialogue of civilizations as well as provide supervision for scores of local and international post graduates.

Activities

11 yrs

To date, the centre has published 3 Volumes of journal KATHA (Sanskrit word for discourse or dialogue) beginning 2004, 2 proceedings, 13 monographs and 11 books. We have conducted 51 international conferences, national seminars, dialogues and workshops. We have hosted 23 visiting scholars since our establishment. Important is also our networking with the local and international agencies. Currently we do consultation work with the ministry of education, ministry of youth and sports, and the department of national unity. The centre sits on various committees that are relevant in policy making. In terms of research and publication our main focus areas at the moment are values, education, and moral empowerment, establishment of national bioethics committee, guideline for environmental ethics based on religion. Further the centre also concentrate on various Asian civilisations, such as the Islamic, Chinese, Indian and Japanese civilisation.

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26 publication

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CONCLUSION

It is obvious that dialogue of civilisation is critically needed today. Although much violence has marked the beginning of the third millennium, the age of dialogue as opposed to monologue is here to stay. Efforts such as indicated by the Earth Charter, the Alliance of Civilisation, ISESCO (Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and the centres of dialogue such as to be found at the University of Szczecin and the University of Malaya, have much to do in terms of promoting mutual understanding and cooperation towards the enhancement and sustainability of civilisation in the future.

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